

time to take your message, which in this instance happens to be our message, up to Capitol Hill. So, I really wanted to come over and thank not only your leaders but all of you for what you're doing. And I'm very grateful.

Today it's Fast Track. Yesterday it was something else. And tomorrow I'll be knocking on your door for support on something else again. But we have worked together, and I'm very, very grateful for that. Thank you very much.

Note: The President spoke at 11 a.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to National Retail Federation officials W.R. Howell, chairman, Tracy Mullin, president of the government and public affairs division, and John J. Schultz, president of the retail services division and executive director; C. Boyden Gray, Counsel to the President; Vice President Dan Quayle, Chairman of the Council on Competitiveness; President Luis Alberto Lacalle of Uruguay; President Carlos Andres Perez of Venezuela; and Prime Minister Michael Manley of Jamaica.

Remarks on Fast Track Legislation and a Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters

May 23, 1991

The President. I assume you want to get my reaction on Fast Track. And I want to simply thank the leaders in Congress on both sides of the aisle. I want to congratulate everyone in our administration who worked so hard on this: Nick Calio, Fred McClure, and of course, most especially, Ambassador Carla Hills, who worked her heart out on this.

And I believe this is a very important step for our country. I think it's a very important step for our neighbors to the south and, hopefully, for Europe as well. So I couldn't be more pleased. The vote was, frankly, larger than I anticipated, though I think I told you all yesterday I thought we would win. But it's a great day, it really is. And it's going to be good for the working man in this country and good for the environment, not the other way around.

So I congratulate the leaders of Congress. I want to single out Congressman Dan Rostenkowski on the House side for his leadership. And I just couldn't be happier. It's a wonderful, wonderful end-of-week present, you might say, for the American people.

Q. How pivotal do you think Mr. Gephardt's decision was in that margin?

The President. Very pivotal, because Dick Gephardt, who wrestled with this for rea-

sons I understood, came down, in my view, on the right side of it. And it wasn't an easy call for him. But he, in my view, made the right decision, and I'm confident that his decision brought along a lot of other votes because he's in the position of leader there and that's important.

The Speaker played it fair all the way. So I have nothing but praise for Congress on this one. And I'm just delighted it worked out that way.

President's Health

Q. Mr. President, is it true that you felt a little bit mentally slowed during your illness?

The President. Rita [Rita Beamish, Associated Press], can I turn the question around and say this: Did I seem a little mentally slow? Here, I'll tell you how it is. [Laughter]

Q. Did you feel mentally slow?

The President. Have you ever gotten tired—has anybody here ever been tired? And if you have, when you're tired it's better to take it easier, take a little time before you come up to try and answer a lot of tough questions. And so, yes, I've been tired, and the medicine is known to do that to people. But I'm back 100 percent, snapped back, and feel sharp as a tack and ready to field the most tough question and do it rapidly. [Laughter]

So no, really, I'm not making this up. I feel much—each day. The weight is still down, but I think the American people have been subjected to perhaps an overdose of analysis on this. But people are interested, and I'm flattered by the interest, but I really am feeling good. I don't know what I have to do to prove it. We could jog a couple today, but I'm not quite ready for that. I hope to exercise this weekend.

Q. —running—

The President. Yes, I'm going to—well, I don't know about running, but I'm going to exercise.

Q. How active are you going to be this weekend, sir?

Q. So we know what to pack.

The President. It will be about the same. I want to do some fishing and play a little golf. But on running, we'll phase back into this.

Q. Are you going to Yale?

The President. I'm going to phase back into this up there—[laughter].

Q. Thank you, Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International].

Federal Budget

Q. Mr. President, how do you feel about the tax plan from the Democrats? The Democrats have—

The President. Well, I haven't studied it yet. My first question would be, how do we pay for all these wonderful things, and do we worry about the deficit? I do. And do we stay within the budget limits, which I am determined they will stay within? But other than that, I'm not going to criticize it before I've studied it. It's just opening round.

Q. Can I ask a Fast Track question, Mr. President?

Soviet Union

Q. —this morning about Mr. Gorbachev at the economic summit. You keep asking the question, will it contribute to reform. How are you inclined to answer that?

The President. But we'll conclude that along the way. I was just on the phone to Prime Minister John Major this morning—Marlin may have told you—and we discussed this. And I'll be talking to the other European leaders. I think we're all

agreed that if it will help, fine.

Q. How do you measure that—

The President. Well, we'll have to wait and see. I don't know exactly how you measure it. I don't know what his plan is.

Q. Do you need a plan—

The President. Well, see, we've got Primakov coming over here with a plan. Let's see what it is. If it makes sense, we'll encourage it. If we have some reservations about it, we owe Mr. Gorbachev, who is a friend that, hey, look, just had some difficulties. So, I don't want to prejudge it before we've even heard from the guy.

Q. Are you disappointed from the reaction from Shamir?

Defense Bill

Q. —Planned Parenthood centers that you have always supported?

The President. I haven't seen the vote today, but I support population efforts. I'm not—obviously not for abortion, if that's—was that related to the defense?

Q. Souter was the deciding vote.

The President. Oh, I didn't see the vote. I thought we were talking about the defense bill yesterday.

Q. Will you veto the defense bill?

The President. Well, I think this will come out of it. I hope it will come out so we don't need the veto. But I've done it before and I would again. I haven't changed my position.

Middle East Peace Talks

Q. Are you disappointed from the reaction that you're getting from Prime Minister Shamir to Secretary of State Baker's comment on the settlements?

The President. I asked Marlin to bring me some comments on this because I haven't seen those. I've had a big day today—busy day. But, look, Secretary Baker was speaking for this administration. And I strongly support what he said. And I strongly support what he's trying to do. There's no light between anyone in the administration. And our policy, as I said earlier, is well-known. And it would make a big contribution to peace if these settlements would stop.

And that's what the Secretary was trying to say. And I thought he said it very well. And I am 100 percent for him. I noticed

some interpretive story today that suggested that I was lightening up. I'm backing the man. He's knocking himself out, going the extra mile for peace. And one way to get there is to have the settlement policy under control. We don't want it expanding like this. There's nothing new in this. This isn't new. This is the age-old policy.

Q. Do you think he is making a connection between the peace and the settlements that—

The President. I'm stating the policy of the United States of America, and so was the Secretary. And I think most people in this country understand it and have understood it. And nothing's different. But we would like to see those settlements stopped. And I'm glad I had the chance to put a little period and exclamation point on this.

Q. Will you be calling Shamir, sir, to discuss this?

The President. I'm in touch with him. I have—I don't know, even know what—I'm a little at a loss because—

Q. He said the Arabs have to give more and that Israel—

The President. Well, everybody has to give. That's what I tried to say today. The goal is to get people talking who have been shouting at each other and arming against each other. And we've got an opportunity now because we do have new credibility—newfound, better credibility in the Middle East, all countries over here in my view. And so what Baker's trying to do, and I back him 100 percent, is to use that to get exactly this done, to have others compromise. Everybody has to give and listen and talk, come to the table, and then we'll see what happens.

Q. Are you finding them more intransigent than you expected?

The President. I don't know than I expected. Nobody said this would be a cakewalk. But we've got a ways to go before I can tell the American people we're there. They're all coming to the table, all those that we've invited. But the Secretary's working hard—

Q. Are you going to invite—

The President. We're doing a lot behind—

Q. Are you going to invite anyone to Washington?

The President. Sorry? A lot behind the scenes.

Q. Is there anything you can do to persuade the Israelis to your point of view—

Q. Invite him where?

Q. —beyond simply talking with them?

The President. Well, I'm going to keep trying. I'm going to keep trying because I think Prime Minister Shamir knows my view on this. I know he knows there's nothing different between present policy and past policy in terms of settlements. But if you mean in the whole scheme of things—

Q. Things like loan guarantees, aid—

The President. Oh, yes. Well, I'm talking about how you get the peace process started. And yes, I'll be talking to anybody that's willing to talk about it, and so will the Secretary.

Thank you very much.

Q. Are you inviting them here?

Soviet Union

Q. Are you considering a meeting with Gorbachev outside Moscow or London?

The President. Not right now.

Q. Something less than a summit?

The President. Not right now.

Q. Did you talk to Major about inviting Gorbachev to London?

Q. What about women in combat?

The President. What about it?

Q. Did you talk to Major about whether he should invite Gorbachev to the summit in London.

Q. Is he in favor of that?

The President. Yes, we did discuss that. But his position is the same as mine. Gorbachev's—I mean, regarding Gorbachev, the Prime Minister and I are in exact sync on this. We both want to look at it and consider it and not leave the door closed nor open, but see what the proposals are. And if it will help, fine.

I mean, Gorbachev, I am still convinced, is working the reform path, working the *perestroika* path. And I'm not going to pull the rug out from under him. On the other hand, we have limitations in what we can do. And when we do something, we want it to be meaningful. We don't want to just have it some gesture that doesn't help the

struggling Soviet economy. So we're in a critical time here in terms of meetings, in terms of G-7 or summit. And I'm anxious to hear from Mr. Primakov, who is Gorbachev's special emissary. Just as he was anxious to hear from our agricultural specialists that went over there, come up with some good ideas. And this is the way you do it. You talk to each other and you keep going. And it's true for U.S.-Soviet, it's true for G-7, and it's true for the Middle East.

Thank you all very much.

Note: The President spoke at 3:30 p.m. at the North Portico of the White House. The President referred to Nicholas E. Calio, Dep-

uty Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs (House); Frederick D. McClure, Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs; U.S. Trade Representative Carla A. Hills; Representatives Dan Rostenkowski and Richard A. Gephardt; Thomas S. Foley, Speaker of the House of Representatives; Prime Minister John Major of the United Kingdom; Marlin Fitzwater, Press Secretary to the President; Yevgeniy Primakov, Soviet Presidential Council member and envoy for Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev; Supreme Court Associate Justice David Souter; Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir of Israel; and Secretary of State James A. Baker III.

Statement on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee's Action Approving the Administration's National Energy Strategy

May 23, 1991

I am pleased to congratulate Chairman Bennett Johnston, Senator Malcolm Wallop and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on the energy bill they approved today. The 17-3 vote by the committee demonstrates a genuine bipartisan commitment to balanced, realistic, and comprehensive energy legislation.

When I announced my National Energy

Strategy (NES) on February 20, I challenged the Congress to do its part to pass the legislation recommended in the NES. The committee's action today, taken on a bipartisan basis, marks a very constructive first step in this process.

The committee's action helps move America toward a more secure, cleaner, and more efficient energy future.

Exchange With Reporters on the Assassination of Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India

May 24, 1991

The President. Well, may I pay my respects to all the Embassy staff, too, and thank you very much for coming out to pay honor to this—we feel this very strongly, your loss.

Q. Mr. President, how confident are you that Indian democracy will pass through this crisis?

The President. India's democracy is strong, steadfast, and it has the full support

of our country. It always has, and it always will. And this is a terrible tragedy. It tests the souls of India, and it tries the hearts of all of us. But I fear not for India's democracy.

Q. Mr. President, are you worried about——

The President. I really must go on.

Q. Are you worried about the sectarian violence and really just wanted to——